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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the two 2000 issues of "Alaska's Children," which provides information on the Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project and updates on Head Start activities in Alaska. Regular features include a calendar of conferences and meetings, a status report on Alaska's children, reports from the Alaska Children's Trust, and "Collaboration Briefings," updates on the collaboration project activities. The Winter 2000 issue focuses on brain development during the first 3 years of life, identifying 6 key findings and their implications for Alaska's children. This issue also discusses the governor's 1999 state of the child address. The Summer 2000 issue addresses welfare reform, focusing on the importance of correcting some of the negative results of welfare reform and providing family supports rather than sanctions; and outlines some of the well-being indicators proposed for the Alaska Child Indicators project. (KB)

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Alaska's Children, 2000
Winter 2000
Summer 2000

Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project

Quarterly Report

Dorothy Douglas, Editor

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

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Alaska Department of Education and Early Development • Quarterly Report • Winter 2000

Alaska's Children

The First Three Years

Myth or Miracle?

About five years ago, some well-known organizations and individuals began to publish some pretty exciting information about child growth and development. **The information drew our attention to the first three years of a child's life and to the development of the human brain.** Among the most comprehensive published reports were *Starting Points* by the Carnegie Corporation and *Rethinking the Brain, New Insights into Early Development* by the Family and Work Institute. A nationwide public education campaign, "I Am Your Child," extended this complicated information to the public through articles in magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*, a one-hour television special and other media events. In 1997, the White House held a conference on Early Childhood Education and Learning: *What New Research on the Brain Tells Us About Our Youngest Children*. Building on these nationwide efforts, individual states began presenting information about the importance of the first three years through conferences, publications, training and educational programs. Alaska was one of these states. In early 1997, a team of public and private organizations and businesses began planning a conference to focus on the state's youngest children. On Septem-

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The Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
For more information, contact the Alaska Head Start Office at (907) 465-4860.
Project Director–Marilyn Webb; Newsletter Editor–Dorothy Douglas

First Three Years, *continued*

ber 23-25, 1998 over six hundred Alaskans attended *The Early Years, The Critical Years – Implications of Brain Research on Early Childhood Policy and Practice in Alaska.*

It is as predictable as rain in Southeast Alaska, that soon after one group of educators or researchers releases new information about child development, an opposing view will soon arrive to challenge or discredit the information. Last summer, John Bruer a consultant on educational issues, authored several articles and a book, *The Myth of the First Three Years – A New Understanding of Early Brain Development and Lifelong Learning.* Bruer is very critical of the "brain-based research" and what he considers misinterpretations about neuroscientific information. He claims brain science is a "myth," that is too theoretical at this point to be real science and has "little to offer educational practice or policy."

Who's Right Anyway

Bruer's theories have sparked some important debates about child development. Debates between scholars and scientists are part of how science works. Sometimes it takes years of discussion before old ideas are replaced by new ones. Bruer's side of the debate challenges current brain-based research and aims to discredit theories about the importance of the first three years of a child's life. On the other side of the debate, there are many studies, publications and experts in the field of child development and neuroscience that support the importance of the first three years and the new findings about brain growth and development. Parents, teachers, policy makers and the public have been caught in the middle of this debate. Those who are interested in the well-being of children must decide, after studying opposing views, if they are willing to wait for absolute decisions among scientists or choose to support current research that makes the most sense.

To begin with, making sense of the wealth of information about human brain development and early childhood development is a huge job. Bruer's book has pulled together an impressive review of brain-based literature and research; even reaching as far back as three centuries to prove a point. But his work does come with a few problems:

- First, Bruer has no formal training in neuroscience or early childhood development. His interpretations of neuroscientific research are only one opinion.
- The "Myth" book is written to appeal to and be purchased by middle class Americans, rarely addressing issues of poverty, violence, poor health or other worries.
- Bruer's work does not give readers a true picture of all the research, studies and information about child growth and development. His work is limited to analysis of neuroscientific research, studies and publications. He does not include current research from other fields like early childhood education, child care, Head Start or the behavioral sciences.
- There are inconsistencies in his work. For example, he cautions the public not to rely on single studies or think that experiments on rats can be used to prove a point about children. However, when it is convenient, he uses these tools to support his own theories.
- Bruer has been promoted as the person responsible for "debunking" popular beliefs about a child's brain development. But, in some areas, Bruer's own theories are right in line with current brain development information.

There are no popular bookstore publications like the "Myth" that packages research and studies supporting brain development and the importance of the first three years. This alone makes it difficult for parents or the public to compare opposing views. And there is a lot to study and compare. At Alaska's *Early Years, Critical Years Conference*, experts in the field of neuroscience, child development, early childhood education and public policy presented key information about current knowledge and practice. Three full days of educational workshops and training sessions, public forums, keynote speeches and work sessions were planned to help educate participants about the first three years of a child's life. Conversations among participants weeks and months after the conference illustrated the interest in, and importance of, current research about early brain development. As a result of the continued interest of participants, conference proceedings were published that summarized, to the extent possible, key findings presented at the conference. These key findings can also serve as an excellent forum to discuss Bruer's opposing views about early brain development. (note: a copy of the full Conference Proceedings is available from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, contact Dorothy Douglas at (907) 465-4547 or e-mail dot_douglas@eed.state.ak.us)

Alaska Key Findings and The Myth

Key Finding 1: There are new discoveries about early brain growth and development. Aided by new scientific research tools, the field of neuroscience has gained more knowledge about early brain growth and development than ever before. Scientists have been able to observe brain structure and function in greater detail and have provided new insights about how the brain grows and develops. Despite this new wealth of knowledge, the neuroscience of early childhood is, in a sense, in its own infancy. Neuroscience alone cannot tell us how to run schools or be better parents. But we do have a great deal of knowledge about child development and learning from other sources. The social sciences, psychology - especially cognitive psychology, early childhood education, medical and developmental research are also key sources of information. Current findings about brain growth and development support and, in many cases, build on many years of early childhood knowledge and accepted practice.

Bruer agrees that neuroscience has put forth some new discoveries about brain development. He states that "in the past fifteen years many theoretical barriers about brain growth and development have fallen." However, he still believes that brain-based science is too new to be taken seriously - that is, until many of these theories have gone through a rigorous scientific review and testing process they should not be used to influence parents, teachers or policy makers. Bruer does not discuss brain-based science in relation to other fields of study. He does not review research and current practice from other sources, or discuss important links between brain-based information and over 50 years of early childhood knowledge.

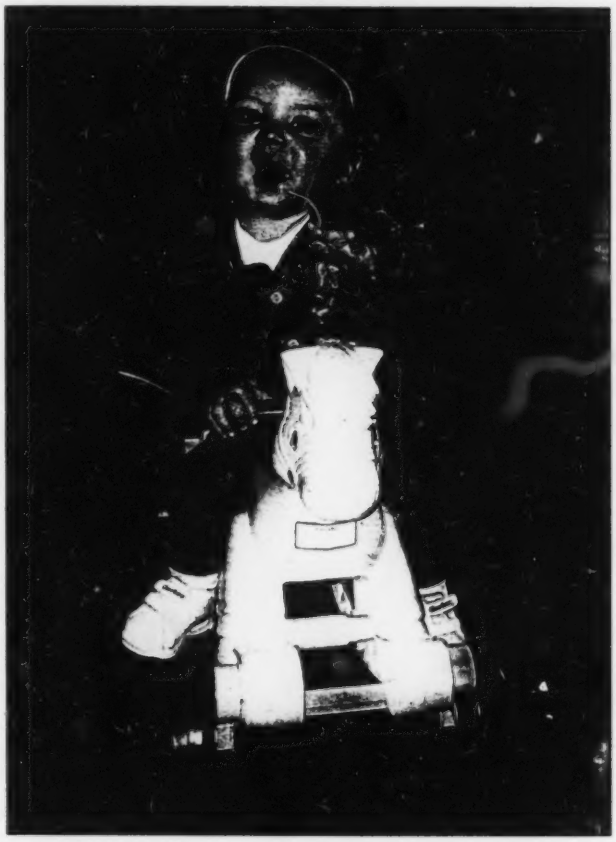
Key Finding 2: The greatest period of brain growth and development is during the first three years of life. At birth, the brain is remarkably unfinished – only those parts of the brain that are necessary for survival are functioning. A baby can see, hear and smell – but only dimly. During the next three years the brain

will grow and develop at an astounding rate. By age three, roughly 85% of the brain's core structures will be organized. The basic building blocks of the brain are neurons (nerve cells) – long wiry cells that carry electrical messages through the nervous system and brain. Neurons are connected by synapses, the plug that allows impulses to flow between them. During prenatal development, the brain forms about 100 billion neurons, but only about 50 trillion synapses, not nearly enough to complete all of the circuits that are required for the complex tasks the brain must do. Soon after birth, neurons begin to organize and the brain begins to form the trillions of additional connections needed to complete brain growth. By the age of three, the number of synapses in the human brain will increase from 50 to 1,000 trillion.

The synapses formed during this growth period are thin and weak at first. As the child receives repeated stimuli and experiences from the environment, synapses become stronger. In this way the connections become "hard wired" into the brain's circuitry. Those synapses that are seldom stimulated remain weak and will eventually be discarded by the brain. By the time a child reaches late adolescence, half of all synapse connections will be discarded, leaving the brain about 500 trillion synapses. In this way, the experiences, both positive and negative, that young children receive are critical for determining how the brain will be organized for all future functioning.

Both neuroscientists and Bruer agree that what happens to synapses during development, and why, are fundamental questions for modern neuroscience, and that much research remains to be done in these areas. Bruer also supports neuroscientific findings about synapse growth and elimination. "What we see from the research is that synaptic densities follow an inverted-U pattern over our lifetimes, as it does over the life span of rhesus monkeys. At birth, we have approximately the same synaptic densities in our cortex that we do as adults. Rapid synapse formation following birth leads to a plateau period. Synapse elimination beginning at puberty reduces densities to adult levels."

Bruer also is willing to speculate that experience may play a part in strengthening synapses. ". . . this also leaves open the possibility that early experience might strengthen existing synapses and that these strengthened synapses would be more likely to survive through the high-plateau period and into adulthood."



Key Finding 3: The human brain has a remarkable capacity to change, but timing is crucial. While learning continues throughout the life cycle, there are "prime times" for optimal development – periods during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific kinds of learning. These periods have been described as "critical periods" when the brain must receive the right experiences at the right time in order to organize and develop correctly. Each functional area of the brain organizes according to its own timetable and level of experience. During the first three years of life, the brain will develop the neurological foundations for vision; hearing and oral language; motor development, including balance; hand/eye coordination; crawling and walking; social attachment and emotional response; cognitive functioning; memory; reasoning and sensory perceptions such as taste, smell and touch. Each of these foundations sets the stage for future learning and more complex activities.

As knowledge about brain development spreads, there has been a tendency to misinterpret some key issues, particularly the "prime times" concept that has been popularly characterized as "windows of opportunity." For example, some people have reasoned that if a two-year old is capable of learning one new word every hour, then teaching her two words must be better. **However, more is not always better.** Over-stimulating children can interfere with development that is occurring in other functional areas of the brain, or simply be a waste of time. Children learn at an age and stage that is appropriate for their individual development; and not all children will reach the developmental milestones at the same time.

Bruer also would agree with much of this key finding. "Although the synaptic preservation strategy does not make much neurological sense, we do know that for some brain systems, normal development does require that certain kinds of experiences occur at certain times during development." He is also supportive of the "more is not better" concept and in particular, is critical of the "windows of opportunity" picture. Bruer and most neuroscientists agree, that the "windows" concept misleads parents into thinking that at some point the "window" will slam shut and a child's learning along with it.

Bruer rightly points out that the critical periods are complex. There are critical-period constraints for specific and limited kinds of learning and development, such as critical periods for vision and hearing. Most learning is not subject to critical-period constraints, not confined to windows of opportunity that slam shut. Learning can and does take place throughout life. What Bruer fails to discuss in any meaningful way, however, are the foundations that are built during the first three years of life. **For example, a child does not simply "learn to read" in first grade.**

Children begin acquiring language during the first months of life. A child will establish neural circuits for the phonetic structure of language, combine syllables into words and words into simple sentences. Around the

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First Three Years, *continued*

age of 36 months, a child can build simple sentences into more complex sentence structure. At the same time a child is acquiring oral language skills, they are building the foundation for turning words into print. At age six months a child will pay attention when an adult reads to them. By 1 year a child will turn the pages of a book or grasp a crayon and discover it will make marks on paper. By age 36 months, a child will follow a simple plot in a story book and join in when being read to. Between the age of 3 and 5, a child will begin to recognize letters of the alphabet, tell the difference between one letter and another, reproduce letters in drawings, and learn that words have meaning. The ability to integrate oral language (sounds) with written language (print) is critical if children are to become competent readers and writers. It is one of the best predictors of success in becoming literate.

Key Finding 4: Early care and Education has a decisive impact on how people develop, their ability to learn, and their capacity to regulate their emotions. The experiences a child receives during the first three years of life play a critical role in healthy brain growth and development. More than anything else, children need to have nurturing, responsive, predictable care and secure attachments to their parents and caregivers. Today, parents are not the only caregivers for children. Approximately 60% of Alaska's preschool-age children have working parents and are receiving some type of care outside the home well before they're three years old. If a child is spending a large part of his day in an environment that is not stimulating and lacking in positive experiences, precious time is being wasted.

In the final chapter of his book, "What's a Mother To Do," Bruer presents his premise about quality early care programs for children. Based on his lengthy discussion of published research, studies and other information, Bruer concludes that quality child care can only boost a child's intelligence 1 to 4 % in the long run. Although he gives the reader no actual information about the cost of care or what defines quality care, he nevertheless concludes that high quality child care is too costly for most families. "You as a parent," he cautions "would also have to know how much the 1 to 4 % improvement would cost." "Questions about reasonable trade-offs between quality and cost are fundamental to childcare policy. Given the small incremental impact of high-quality care versus good to mediocre care, what is the preferable way to invest the resources that we are likely to have..."

Of all of the theories Bruer puts forth, this is one of his most dangerous. **The sole reason for choosing quality child care never has been or should be, about boosting a child's intelligence.** Quality child care provides a safe, secure and stable environment; enriched with the daily experiences that support a child's overall health and development while his/her parents are working. Child care providers should be well-trained and capable of providing appropriate care according to the age and stage of the individual child's development. For example, the needs of infants and toddlers are very different from the needs of a school-age child, as are the needs of a disabled or medically fragile child from the needs of a healthy, stable child. Parents should not have to choose between poor, mediocre and quality care. All parents should be able to access quality care and all providers should be compensated for the important work they do. Sadly this is not the case. Nationwide, the majority of child care is rated as mediocre to poor and in some cases, unsafe.

Parents should seriously consider what mediocre and poor child care means for a child. For example, it could mean that:

- Providers have not had adequate training or education, possibly including first aid and CPR training.
- Child/staff ratios are too high so that children may be unsupervised at times.
- Children may not have access to healthy activities like outdoor play or field trips.
- Watching videos may be a primary activity instead of being read to or helping with a cooking project.
- Providers are constantly leaving their jobs because of low wages and poor working conditions. Parents are forced to find new child care arrangements and children are forced to adjust to another new situation.

Bruer is also critical of other early care and education programs like Head Start, totally disregarding current longitudinal studies about the program. Findings from a recently published Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) show that a typical Head Start four-year-old completing Head Start has knowledge and skills in early literacy and numeracy, improved health and social skills signifying readiness to learn in kindergarten. The FACES study also shows that families are involved in their children's education despite challenges they face such as lack of employment, poverty, inadequate housing or poor medical care.

Key Finding 5: Early negative experiences, abuse and neglect, or the absence of appropriate stimulation can have serious and sustained effects on brain growth and development. Research has documented that sustained early abuse and neglect, emotional deprivation or exposure to violence at an early age can interfere with normal brain development in children. If a child's early experiences are fear and stress, then the neurochemical responses to fear and stress become the stimuli that shape the developing brain. For example, early trauma elevates stress hormones, such as cortisol. High cortisol levels during the vulnerable years of zero to three increase activity in the part of the brain involved in vigilance and arousal. As a result the brain remains in a constant state of high alert. The slightest stress unleashes another surge of stress hormones

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causing hyperactivity, anxiety and impulsive behavior. Children who are abused early in life or live in un-stimulating environments are much more likely to suffer impairments in cognitive learning abilities, physical development, emotional and impulsive behavior control, and the ability to form secure attachments later in life.

Bruer's book is written to appeal to middle class America. He devotes very little time or effort to issues like poor health, lack of adequate medical care, poverty, abuse, neglect, family violence or homelessness. Bruer does not address the immense and crucial social and emotional development that begins in early childhood and the effects of abuse, neglect and violence. Trauma and abuse are not the only conditions that can lead to developmental delays or impairments. Research has shown that emotional neglect, social deprivation and a chronic lack of stimulation are among major factors that jeopardize early development. Long-term research has also confirmed the link between poor attachment to parents and primary caregivers and violence. Children, whose primary caregivers were emotionally unavailable in the early years of life due to depression, substance abuse and other risk factors, exhibit more aggression and conduct problems in childhood and adolescence.

Key Finding 6: Evidence about early brain development points to the critical need for prevention and early intervention. During the first three years of life, the profusion of synapses in a child's brain gives the brain exceptional flexibility or malleability. At no other time will the brain be able to master new skills so readily, or rebound from setbacks so easily. If there is a way to compensate for brain injury, disabilities, or early negative experiences, the brain can be taught to find it. Study after study shows that intensive, well-designed, timely intervention can improve the prospects and the quality of life for many children who are considered to be at risk.

One of the findings that Bruer is adamant about is the brain's "plasticity." He states, ".. the first three years are not the only years we have to build better brains. The brain is not "cooked" by age 3 or age 10. Our brains remain remarkably plastic and we retain the ability to learn throughout our lives." If a child does not acquire early literacy skills in preschool, they can still learn to read in first grade; and if they are still not readers by age 18, there are still adult literacy programs. What Bruer does not emphasis, however, is that the chance of a functionally illiterate adult becoming a competent reader is very slim, or that adult literacy programs require intensive instruction and are very expensive.

Both Bruer and neuroscience would agree that children whose early emotional circuits were wired by abuse and neglect, or who experienced developmental delays due to injury or poor health are not doomed to lives of violence or school failure. As children move into the second decade of life, it appears to be more difficult to bring about change, but with timely and well-designed interventions, it is possible. Interventions, however, are costly and come with no guarantee. Bauer, however, chooses not to discuss the dollar or emotional costs associated with helping children with developmental delays. Nor does he talk about the financial benefits and need for preventing problems before they occur in the first place.

Key Finding 7: Research on brain growth has critical implications for improving public policy and practice, education systems and business practices. There is a wide gap between what is known and about early brain growth and development and what is being done on a local, state and national level to support a child's healthy growth and development. Nationwide we invest the least amount of our public resources in children under age five. Early education programs, public schools and policy makers can benefit from new information about brain research and long-standing information about child development.

Bruer believes that this is one of the dangers of the "first three years myth." He cautions readers that once the "Myth" is accepted by policy makers, it will mean resources will taken away from programs for older children and adults and diverted to programs for young children. Advocates for young children have never supported such a position. This position is clearly stated in the publication *Rethinking the Brain.* "Optimal development and learning for Americans of all ages must be a top national priority, so that a good start in life for our youngest children is not purchased at the expense of their older brothers and sisters."

"What's A Mother (or the rest of us) To Do"

The final chapter of the "Myth" book - "What's A Mother To Do," pretty much sums up Bruer's feelings about the brain science. He concludes that educators, policy makers and, in particular, parents . . . "would all do well to abandon the Myth." "There is little that is new in the brain-based parenting advice, and the articles do not give you much specific

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COLLABORATION

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Head Start Beats Mercedes

For the first time, government agencies are participating in the measurement of customer satisfaction as part of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). ACSI is the national indicator of customer evaluations of the quality of goods and services available to U.S. residents. It is the only uniform, cross industry/government measure of customer satisfaction. Since 1994, ACSI has measured satisfaction, its causes and effects, for seven economic sectors, 34 industries, over 170 private sector companies, two types of local government services, the U.S. Postal Service and the Internal Revenue Service. This year, a substantial portion of the federal government joined the ACSI. The 30 agencies participating in ACSI serve 90% of federal government customers.

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) chose Head Start as the program to measure for their agency. The ACF decided that parents are the measure of customer satisfaction in Head Start programs. They provided a listing of its entire directory of Head Start Centers totaling more than 1,600 nationwide. A geographically representative sample of former and current Head Start parents were contacted and interviewed about their satisfaction with their Head Start Program. The 1999 overall customer satisfaction index for Head Start is 87.15 points above the current national score of 73. **Head Start received the highest score of any government agency or private company, even surpassing the ratings of Mercedes-Benz and BMW.**

Governor Tony Knowles' 1999 State of the Child Address

On November 9, 1999 Governor Knowles presented his Annual State of the Child Address before the Association of Alaska School Boards. The annual address grew out of a recommendation from the Alaska Children's Cabinet five years ago. This is the fourth report to the people of Alaska on the status and progress of the well being of Alaska's children. Following are excerpts from this speech.

. . . "one of our greatest challenges is providing safe, loving homes to hundreds of children in state custody. Thousands of Alaskans selflessly open their homes as foster parents . ." "Because our new child protection law and response to reports of harm are working so well, there are a record high number of children in foster care today – more than 1,100. Yet a third of our foster homes are overcapacity. To address their needs quickly and effectively for the coming year, I will ask the Legislature for the necessary funds (for foster care). To provide for children with severe behavioral and physical needs unsuitable for traditional foster care, we must expand our system of round-the-clock residential care homes in four communities – Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau and Kenai.

"We have a special obligation and duty to ensure that foster and residential care is safe. So for the coming year, I will seek the necessary resources for fingerprint and background checks of all adults who work with foster children.

"Many foster children who are adopted have special challenges – medical and behavioral problems that would tax any family. I have made it a priority to help these families through our subsidized adoption program – by placing into permanent homes this past year more than 300 children who lingered for three years or longer in the foster care system. This program helps families in a modest way with the expenses of raising an adopted child with challenges. It could never repay the love, sweat and tears lavished on these needy children. I expect – I hope – this program can grow by 500 families in the next two years, and I will be asking for the necessary financial support.

"We also will seek more child protection workers and better ensure their safety by finally providing them with adequate emergency and communications equipment.

"By meeting that commitment today with the necessary resources, we save millions tomorrow in the cost of prisons, welfare and heartbreak. The special focus on foster care, adoptions, and child protection needs I've spelled out this morning may well mean additional funds approaching 10 million dollars.

"While we are still in the preliminary stages of budgeting, my direction to state departments is that we will fund children's priorities. My bottom line is: we will not balance our budget on the backs of our children's health, safety or education.

"Safe, healthy children are just part of our goal. Once we get kids to school ready to learn, we need to make sure schools are ready to deliver. To achieve that, we launched two major improvements: the quality schools initiative and sorely needed additional funds for public schools. The 26 million additional dollars for public schools last year and this, is the first increase in the foundation formula beyond enrollment growth in more than a decade. I believe the Quality Schools Initiative is the most profound opportunity for positive change in Alaska's public education system since statehood.

"The Quality Schools Initiative is based on five principles:

- First, if we raise the academic bar, children will respond;
- Second, accountability is a necessary component of education – the public is demanding it;
- Third, teachers and administrators need training to teach in standards-based schools;
- The fourth principle requires parents

and community members, including businesses to be active partners;

- Our final principle is that schools must be safe. We don't need armed guards and metal detectors. We need to identify at-risk children and intervene meaningfully to stop youth violence at school and in our communities.

"But the Initiative has many other moving parts – higher standards for teachers and students; skills profiles for beginning students; benchmark testing in 3rd, 6th and 8th grades; and required improvements for low-performing schools. To keep our end of the bargain, we will continue our financial commitments to education in the coming year. The cost of fully meeting our obligation for pupil enrollment, quality schools and transportation could reach 15 to 20 million dollars over current-year funding. Final enrollment numbers are due at the end of this month. But whatever that cost, I will ask the Legislature to fund it for Fiscal 2000. And I repeat, we will not retreat nor balance the budget on the backs of our children's health, safety or education.

"Our commitment to education also demands smart management and efficiency. Alaskans are willing to pay more when they are convinced they're getting the best value for each dollar. I believe we can achieve efficiencies in school district expenditures through consolidated business functions. Some districts can regionalize or combine with municipality's functions such as payroll, personnel, information systems and purchasing. Applying best business practices can lead to significant savings. No amount is too small.

"So I'd like to issue this challenge. School districts statewide spend about $60 million a year on traditional business functions. I believe that can be trimmed by 10 percent – a $6 million savings. And I pledge that any savings will be returned to that district for use in the classroom.

"Value and efficiency also includes being smart about how we build and maintain schools. Crumbling classrooms, leaking roofs and honey buckets as plumbing are unacceptable. Despite solutions we've offered for rural school needs, the Legislature has overlooked them in recent years. Now the courts have spoken. We are working to bring all parties to the table and agree on a funding plan to put all Alaska children in schools they deserve. Our hope is to resolve this in the schoolhouse not the courthouse.

"As the Quality Schools Initiative moves forward, two important dates lie ahead. One is 2002. That's when the state will designate every public school in Alaska 'distinguished,' 'successful,' 'deficient' or 'in crisis.' We will honor top-flight schools. For those not doing the job, we will insist on improvement.

"The other key date is more imminent - March 2000. That's when the high school qualifying exam will be given. Sophomores will take it first so they'll have plenty of time to try again, if necessary. They'll be tested in reading, writing and math – based on academic standards taught in high school and earlier grades.

"(The) handbook the School Boards Association produced – 'Helping Kids Succeed, Alaskan Style' – has a quote highlighted inside. It serves as a reminder to each of us who get up every day dedicated to improving the state of Alaska's children. It says: 'Shoot for the Moon. Even if you miss it, you will land among the stars.' "

Calendar of Events

February 2-4 Anchorage, AK	*Bilingual Multicultural Education Equity Conference*	
February 24-26 Washington, D.C.	*National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies 12th Annual Symposium*	
February 28-29	*Alaska Head Start Association Pre-Conference Meeting*	Pam Gingue (907) 883-5159
March 1-3 Captain Cook Hotel Anchorage, AK	*Region X Head Start Training Conference "Celebrating The Past: Creating The Future"*	
March 6-9 Albuquerque, NM	*19th Native American Child and Family Conference*	(405)360-2919
March 16-19 New Orleans, LA	*2000 National Child Care Association Annual Conference*	(800)543-7161
March 25-28 New York City, NY	*Children's Defense Fund National Conference2000 – Taking Responsibility for Our Children In the 21st Century*	(800)CDF-1200
March 31- April 2 Anchorage, AK	*Weaving a Circle of Care, Alternative Care Conference Alaska Foster Parent Training Center*	1-800-478-7307
April 26-29 Washington, D.C.	*Head Start Fulfilling the Promise, NHSA 27th Annual Training Conference*	
June 28-July 1 Washington, D.C.	*Head Start's Fifth National Research Conference" Developmental and Contextual Transitions Of Children and Families: Implications for Research, Policy and Practice.*	(703) 821-3090 ex.233
July 9-13 Arlington, VA	*National Indian Head Start Directors Association's 10th National Training Conference and 20th Year Celebration*	(405) 360-2919
October 23-25 zxx Anchorage, AK	*Alaska Children's Mental Health Conference Ways to Care – Connections to Make (Call for papers by February 29, 2000)*	

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Alaska Head Start Association

NEWS

Region X Head Start Association Training Conference.

The Alaska Head Start Association is very honored to host the Region X Head Start Association Training Conference. The theme of this Conference is "Celebrating Our Past; Creating Our Future." A rich selection of workshops and training sessions has been built around this theme. The Conference will begin on Monday, February 28, with preconference meetings and workshops. The Opening Session for the conference will begin on Wednesday, March 1. All events will be held at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska. Invited Guests for the Conference include: Governor Tony Knowles; Patricia Montoya, Commissioner, Administration of Children, Youth and Families, Washington, D.C.; Anne Linehan, Operations Manager, National Head Start Association, Washington, D, C.; Nancy Hutchins, Region X Head Start; and Helen Scheirbeck, Region XI American Indian Program Branch Head Start. Alaska Conference Co-chairs are Shirley Pittz, RurAL CAP, and Krishna Moore, Chugiak Children's Services. Reference the chart below for events during Head Start week in Alaska.

Head Start Directors Complete Fellowship Program

Four Alaska Head Start Directors have completed the Johnson and Johnson Head Start Management Fellow Program. Valerie Larson, Director of Bristol Bay Native Association Head Start; Theo McIntyre, Director of Metlakatla Indian Community Head Start; Shirley Pittz, RurAL CAP Head Start Director; and MaryEllen Fritz, Southcentral Foundation Head Start Director were selected to attend the Fellowship Program. Conducted by the Anderson Graduate School of Management, University of California (UCAL), the intensive two-week program aims to enhance management skills of Head Start Directors around the nation. Johnson & Johnson awarded the Anderson Graduate School a $584,000 grant to administer the program, which has graduated more then 500 Head Start Directors since 1991. To compete for the management fellowship, applicants must have been directors for at least three years. A team of UCAL faculty members selects the directors who participate in the program. The selection process guarantees that the program represents Head Start Programs nationwide in terms of urban/rural mix, size and other demographic factors. Johnson & Johnson, the corporate leader supporting Head Start, has invested over $4 million in the program since 1991. Report from the Northwest Region – Alakanuk, Chevak, Emmonak, Hooper Bay

Report from the Northwest Region – Alakanuk, Chevak, Emmonak, Hooper Bay

by Teresa Pingayak

Recently, I went to support a family who had lost a loved one in another village. As usual, the whole village got together, and relatives of the family came from everywhere to help the family. This has always been a wonderful part of being in a close knit community, not only in villages, but in other places as well. Having the support of relatives and friends is one of the priceless ways that one can give to another in the time of need.

I thought about each one of my children. Have I taken the time to let each one know through my actions and words that I appreciate them for who they are? Have I taken the time to spend quality time with each child, or do I pay attention only when something negative happens? I thought about how I could become a more responsive parent and all the other things I could do better in my life because I am the teacher in the life of my children. I always believed that my children are the extension of who I am and what values I teach them will reflect on them for the rest of their lives and be passed onto the next generation to come.

Today is a new day and a new beginning for me.

Schedule of Events — Head Start Week

Monday – 2/28	Tuesday – 2/29	Wednesday – 3/1	Thursday - 3/2	Friday – 3/3
RX Meeting	RX Board Mtg. Meeting	AHSA Breakfast 7:30-9:30	8:30-12:00 Workshops	8:30 – 10:00 Workshops
	1) Region X Disabilities Coordinators Retreat	10:00 – 1:00 Opening Session	1:00 – 4:30 Workshops	10:30 – 12:00 Closing Session
	2) Quilt	8:00 - 6:00 Vendors Open	7:30 am-6:00 pm Vendors Open	No Exhibits
	3) Culturally Based Curriculum	1:00 – 4:30 Workshops	5:30-7:30 Reception and Keynote	
		5:30 – 7:00- AHSA Reception		

First Three Years, *continued*

guidance on what to do, other than to follow traditional middle-class parenting practices."

Bruer is partially correct. **The first three years of a child's life have been described as a time of natural learning. Parents, no matter what their socio-economic status, educational background, marital status or cultural/ethnic background is, are natural teachers. Everyday, the instinctive things that parents do support their children's learning.** Holding and cuddling an infant helps to develop a child's emotional attachment. Talking, singing or naming objects in the grocery store supports a child's language development. Reading to a child, helping them learn to use a crayon or paint brush, sends them on their way to becoming competent readers and writers. Healthy food, naps, outdoor play and exercise helps a child develop physically. Medical check-ups, immunizations, a home free of hazards,

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STATUS REPORT

Alaska's Children

A national poll of Police Chiefs called for state and national policy makers to boost funding for after-school programs and child care. The poll shows that:

- 86% of the Chiefs said "Expanding after-school programs and educational child care programs like Head Start would greatly reduce youth crime and violence";
- 69% of Chiefs gave the highest priority to providing "more after-school programs and educational childcare," when asked to guide elected officials by ranking four strategies to reduce youth violence. The other strategies were: 17% prosecute more juveniles as adults, 13% hire more police officers to investigate juvenile crème; 1% install more metal detectors and surveillance cameras in schools.
- 91% of Chiefs agreed: "If America does not make greater investments in after-school and educational child care programs to help children and youth now, we will pay far more in crime, welfare and other costs."

Source: Fight Crime, Invest in Kids

A national poll conducted in August asked participants to respond to questions about children's issues and programs. Questions and results were:

As children head back to school what are you most concerned about:

- violence/crime – 47%
- Inadequate education – 18%
- The cost of education – 2%
- Any other concerns – 21%
- No concern/answer – 11%

To provide kids in your community with access to good after-school programs and early childhood development programs like Head Start, would you be willing to pay more taxes or pass up a tax cut:

- Pay more taxes – 50%
- Unwilling to pay more taxes, but willing to pass up a tax cut – 24%

Which of these priorities are more important than cutting taxes?

Providing access to after-school and early childhood development

- programs like Head Start – 67%
- Paying off national debt – 66%
- Building new highways – 32%
- Building more advanced military weapons/ spending more on military pay – 27%
- Don't know/none of these – 5%

Source: Opinion Research Poll International for Fight Crime – Invest in Kids

Only ten percent of children eligible for federal child care assistance in 1998 received it. Approximately 14.7 million children in low-income families were eligible to receive a subsidy under federal income limits in 1998, but funding allowed for only 1.5 million children to actually receive assistance. Parents who must wait for child care support are seven times more likely to rely on public assistance than employed parents who receive a subsidy.

Source: Access to Child Care for Low-Income Working Families, HHS

Military child care centers pay staff about $1.04 an hour more than civilian centers. As a result, staff turnover in military child care centers declined to 40% annually from as much as 300% during the 1980s.

Source: Preschool Programs Biweekly Newsletter, November 24, 1999

The Anchorage School District reported that their new Independent Reader Assessment showed that 41% of third-grade students last year – about 1,400 pupils – could not read without help.

Source: Anchorage Daily News, 10/12/99

Alaska's
Children

Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
P.O. Box 112100
Juneau, Alaska 99811-2100

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First Three Years, *continued*
support a child's health and safety. Children do not need to listen to an expensive Mozart CD to support their cognitive development - learning traditional Native dancing and songs will be much more enriching. Parents do not need to rush out and buy the latest toy "guaranteed to boost your baby's brain power." Some homemade play dough and a few hours of an adult's time is one the best brain boosters. Brain science certainly confirms that these kinds of natural learning supports from parents and caregivers are just what a developing brain needs.

Brain science also supports many other things that parents and care givers need to know. Parents need to be very sensitive to possible problems and quick to seek help if necessary. We need to understand that if an infant has vision problems that are not corrected early, the sensory system can be compromised for a lifetime. Chronic ear infections can affect hearing and impede language development, literacy and subsequent educational success. Parents also should be aware of developmental milestones, like learning to crawl, walk, manipulate small objects, and know where and when to seek help if developmental problems are evident. Parents also need to know that neglect, abuse, family violence and other challenges can have a lifelong effect on children.

As for the "rest of us" - can brain science answer important questions about child development, or help us make policy and budget decisions? The answer for most of us should be - "It would be foolish to ignore it." Unfortunately, Bruer chooses to do just that by thinking that middle-class-parenting practices (whatever those are) will solve all our problems and answer all our questions.

The debate about the first three years is far from over. Neuroscience is one of the fastest growing fields of scientific study and everyday, more information is being added to the body of knowledge about brain development and young children. We can draw on this knowledge, as well as knowledge from other fields, from parents, caregivers, health care professionals and many others. All of this information can help us answer the most important question we should be asking: whether or not we can make life better for our children.

For those who are interested in this question, an important opportunity awaits you. This March, Dorothy Routh, one of the keynote speakers and workshop presenters for Alaska's *Early Years, Critical Years Conference* will return to our state. Ms. Routh will hold intensive training sessions on how the brain develops, brain research findings, and why these findings are important for parents, teachers and policy makers. The schedule of training sessions is Juneau – March 17 and 18, Anchorage – March 20 and 21, Fairbanks – March 23. Anyone interested in attending this training, or receiving additional information about the training events can contact Marilyn Webb at (907)465-4861.

Information sources: Conference *Proceedings, The Early Years, The Critical Years – Implications of Brain Research on Early Childhood Policy and Practice in Alaska. Rethinking the Brain,* Rima Shore, Families and Work Institute. *The Myth of the First Three Years,* John T. Bruer. "In Search of . . . . Brain Based Education", John T. Bruer, Phi Delta Kappa International. "Educators Need to Know about the Human Brain", Ron Brandt, Phi Delta Kappa, 11/99. "Response to The Myth of the First Three Years, ZERO TO THREE." *Starting Points - Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children,* Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development • Quarterly Report • Summer 2000

PS 022222

Alaska's Children

Welfare to Work, Measuring Our Children, Saying Goodbye

Unfinished Business

In response to the national welfare reform legislation, Governor Knowles signed Alaska's welfare reform law in June 1996. The intent of these state and federal laws was to end the generation to generation cycle of welfare dependence. Welfare recipients are now required to actively seek employment, or participate in employment related activities like job training or community service. States are required to set lifetime limits on the amount of time families could continue to receive cash assistance from welfare programs. By requiring this work first approach, congressional leaders sought to shrink existing welfare rolls, build family economic stability, and offer stronger role models to children who would see their parents as responsible employees. Supports for working parents like quality child care programs were supposed to be in place so that parents could hold down a job and not have to worry about their child's early development.

As welfare reform efforts move into the third year, congressional leaders are looking at enrollment numbers and declaring reform programs are *working and working well*. Success stories usually include information like the following:

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The Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
For more information, contact the Alaska Head Start Office at (907) 465-4860.
Project Director–Marilyn Webb; Newsletter Editor–Dorothy Douglas

Welfare to Work, *continued*

- Nationally, welfare caseloads have dropped 31 percent since the federal law was passed in August of 1996. In 1998 alone, 1.5 million people on welfare in 1997 joined the workforce.
- Alaska's numbers also look good. In the past three years, Alaska's caseloads have dropped 35 percent. From July 1997 to July 1999, more than 4,000 Alaska families left welfare, dropping the welfare caseload to its lowest level since 1991 and saving the state $41 million in reduced welfare payments. Of the roughly, 7,700 Alaskans currently receiving benefits, more than half are working in part-time jobs or participating in job training or education programs. Because the new welfare laws impose a 5-year lifetime limit on benefits, Alaska expects to see continued reductions in the number of families receiving benefits in the next two years.

More than Numbers

Counting the number of families who no longer receive welfare benefits does not tell the whole story about welfare reform. Three major studies in 1999 demonstrated that many families are leaving welfare, but they are not leaving poverty and the numerous risk factors associated with it. The Urban Institute found the average wage for welfare leavers is only $6.61 an hour, or about $13,748 for full-time, year-round work – just above the poverty line for a family of three. A General Accounting Office report confirmed many of these findings. The report found that between 61 and 87 percent of adults leaving public assistance have gotten jobs. Most of these workers, however, are employed in low-income jobs such as restaurant and retail sales. Five states reported that a significant number of welfare leavers still qualified for Medicaid and food stamps. In August of 1999, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities released a study on the impacts of welfare reform on single-mother families. The study found their incomes actually fell from 1995 to 1997. The study essentially argues that welfare has been replaced by working poverty.

These studies and other research projects are showing the results of the national welfare experiment is not the resounding success that politicians have reported – it is, rather, a mixed bag of information. For example:

- **Not all welfare leavers have found employment**. Nine state studies compiled by the National Governors' Association found that 40 to 50 percent of families who left welfare programs did not have a job.
- **The majority of families who leave welfare are not better off economically**. Most jobs held by former welfare recipients do not pay enough to bring the family out of poverty.
- **Studies show that while the overall child poverty rate has gone down slightly, extreme child poverty is increasing.**

Few states have moved to correct some of these negative aspects of welfare reform even though they have the financial resources to do so.

- **Few states are using concrete indicators of family well-being – housing stability, hunger, access to health care, and family stress – as one of the measures of welfare reform**. However, informal studies from food banks, housing programs, homeless shelters and faith organizations report that more families are using their services and that the majority of those families are former welfare recipients.
- **The work-first requirement has moved an additional one million children away from their mothers and into child care settings.**
- One study found that most children are placed in home-based care – family child care homes, with a relative or with a friend. In most cases, the care is not licensed. **The home-based care in the study was below the average quality level found in center-based care. The study also found that the quality of most center-based care programs is mediocre.**
- **Many families are not able to find care that meets their individual needs.** Specialized care for infants and toddlers, special needs children, before and after school programs are in short supply. Additionally, child care is in very short supply for parents who must work evening or weekend jobs, or have sick children.
- Little has been done to improve the quality of child care even though study after study shows that the **quality of care children receive, especially very young children, affects a child's development and quality programs can effectively support early learning.**
- A key component of welfare reform efforts, child care subsidies, is not adequate to serve all families who need help with child care costs. Federal laws gave states broad options to develop state specific plans. Welfare and child care subsidy programs, therefore, vary widely from state to state. Alaska's child care subsidy program assures that help with the cost of child care will be available to parents while they are receiving cash assistance and for a least one year after finding a job if their income stays below a certain level. Low-income families who have used up their one-year entitlement or who have never been on welfare, may or may not receive assistance with child care if funds are not available. **For the past two years, Alaska has had to establish subsidy wait lists for low-income families due to lack of funds.**
- Additionally, because child care subsidy programs cap payments for services, it has the indirect effect of driving the market rate for child care services all across the state. **Nationwide and in Alaska, child care remains one of the lowest paid job classes and has the highest turnover rate of any occupation.**

Spreading the Wealth

Few states have moved to correct some of these negative aspects of welfare reform even though they have the financial resources to do

so. Under the federal welfare program, funds come to states in fixed amounts, known as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants. States are required to match at least 80 percent of the federal grant with state funds. As welfare caseloads decline, states are left with unspent federal TANF funds. After the first quarter of 1999, states had access to $4.2 billion in unobligated TANF funds. One TANF funding estimate shows these savings could balloon to $24 billion by 2002. As of October 1999 Alaska had counted $41 million in TANF savings. Under broad federal guidelines, states are allowed to use these TANF savings to support programs and services that will benefit children and families. Alaska's TANF savings have made millions of dollars available for child care subsidies, work services, child health programs, and other welfare related programs. But, millions of TANF dollars have also been used to supplant or replace state funds as part of the legislative budget-cutting plan. For example, approximately $2.4 million state Head Start dollars were replaced with federal TANF savings in the FY 2000 budget. TANF savings have also been used to replace state funds for domestic violence programs, work/job training, child care quality improvements, child care licensing, and others. **It is important to note that these TANF savings are one-time funds.** The next round of TANF block grants will be based on the number of families currently receiving welfare benefits. All states can expect substantial reductions in the amount of federal funds and must plan their budgets accordingly. **Alaska's budget process over the next few years, therefore, should address specific plans for funding the essential services that are being paid for with these one-time TANF surplus dollars.**

Criteria for Success.

Reducing welfare caseloads is only one measure of success, and may not even be an accurate one. Historically, two-thirds of welfare recipients are either on assistance for a short time, or on-and-off depending on the local economy. Even before current welfare reform efforts began, welfare roles were beginning drop, perhaps due to our robust economy. Again historically, efforts to move the remaining one-third of welfare recipients into lasting work have been unsuccessful. This group, often called "hard to serve clients", may be unable to work because they have chronic mental or physical illnesses, drug/alcohol addictions, lack basic education or job skills, have children who require special child care arrangements, or have other severe problems like domestic violence. Additionally, in Alaska, the lack of jobs in rural and remote areas means that moving some welfare recipients into the workforce is simply not possible.

Another welfare reform measure, and in the long run a more important measure of success, is the well-being of children and families. If our welfare reform policies have pushed families into unstable and low-paying jobs, then chances are we have created an environment for children that can hurt their health and emotional well-being, and compromise their later success in school and in life. A truer measure of success would be identifying families who have moved from welfare into jobs that pay a living wage so that children always have: nutritious food, safe and stable housing, health care coverage that includes well-child checkups, reliable family transportation, quality early care and education programs, and a little pot of money left over for toys and books.

If our welfare reform policies have pushed families into unstable and low-paying jobs, then chances are we have created an environment for children that can hurt their health and emotional well-being, and compromise their later success in school

Achieving this kind of success would refocus our priorities. For example . . .

Instead of work first, a main goal of welfare reform could be training and education first. Welfare recipients often lack the education, work history, and job skills necessary to find and keep a *job that pays a family supporting wage*. Most states have not included education-based strategies as a significant piece of welfare reform efforts even though TANF funds can be used to pay for needed education and training. Because welfare roles have dropped dramatically, all 50 states have met the federal government's work participation guidelines and all states are carrying large TANF funding surpluses. The public's attitudes are also changing about former welfare families who, even though they are working, live in poverty. **States can now afford, both economically and politically to invest in the future of families through education**. Some states have figured out how to make education and training really work for families. In Alaska, the University system has partnered with Head Start to provide distance delivery coursework for staff. This "Circles of Learning" program was specifically designed to help meet the national mandate requiring Head Start programs to have staff with CDA and AA credentials. Because Head Start provides job opportunities for parents who may be receiving welfare cash benefits, this educational program presents an important opportunity. Parents who complete the University coursework will have qualifications that will help them earn higher wages and reduce family risks associated with poverty.

Instead of sanctions, family supports. Welfare clients can be sanctioned if they do not participate in training or work related activities. Sanctions usually result in a loss of cash payments to families. States may not sanction families if they meet certain exemptions like lack of available or affordable child care, no transportation or chronic illness. Yet studies show that states routinely sanction families who qualify for work or training exemptions under welfare reform laws. The most common cause for unnecessary sanctions is because caseworkers lack the training and time necessary to identify barriers to employment and to link families to needed supports so they can engage in work activities. When we sanction families, we sanction children.

Instead of time limits, plans for a child's future. It is important to remember that welfare reform programs were and are, intended to be child-welfare programs. Their purpose is to make sure the basic necessities - adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care – are available to children whose parents are unemployed or working in jobs that pay poverty and below poverty level wages. One of the real dangers of the current welfare system is the lifetime limit states are required to impose on

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Measuring Our Children

A lack of programs and services is the most pressing problem for children and their families in rural areas, according to those who recently reviewed a state project aimed at developing measures of child health and well-being.

Some 150 Alaskans sent in comments on the Alaska Child Indicators project, a federally funded effort to answer the question: *Are conditions getting better or worse for children in our state?* Indicators are quantitative measures that allow us to track broad trends over time.

To get public comments on the indicators project, the Department of Education and Early Development mailed brochures last fall to more than 6,000 Alaskans. A free-lance harpist, a chamber of commerce director and a school district superintendent were among those who responded. Issues raised ranged from fluoridated water to family privacy, but some significant themes emerged.

Rural respondents cited the need for more public health nurses, parenting classes, and parks and trails. Several wrote that the draft indicators set showed an urban bias and needed to do a better job of reflecting the culture and conditions in rural Alaska. As a first step, a project representative participated in the Native Alaskan Traditional Child Rearing and Parenting Conference held last month in Anchorage.

Other respondents noted the absence of indicators related to the spiritual and moral development of children. Some suggested that we add measures of: parent involvement in schools, children's daily TV time, developmental disabilities and environmental health. One limitation to developing these kinds of measures is a lack of reliable data. The indicators project has, however, provided the impetus for new data collection in the areas of child care and dental health care.

Following are sample of indicators that have been proposed in five focus areas:

1. Healthy children

- Percent of women who receive adequate prenatal care
- Percent of babies born at full term
- Percent of children fully immunized by age 2

2. Stable families

- Percent of stable new families (first birth to mother who has completed high school; is age 20 or older; with father's name on child's birth certificate)
- Percent of children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold
- Child abuse and neglect rate: reported and substantiated

3. Children Ready for School/ Schools Ready for Children

- Percent of child care providers who have completed a Child Development Associate degree or equivalent
- Percent of Head Start-eligible children who are served
- Percent of children who can demonstrate all tasks/behaviors in the four developmental areas included on the Alaska Kindergarten Developmental Profile*

4. Children succeeding in school

- Percent of students proficient in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of third grade
- School attendance rate

5. Supportive neighborhoods and communities

- Crime rate
- Voter turnout rate

A long-term goal of the Indicators Project is to make this information readily available to the public. Project developers believe that regional or community-level information is a critical tool for evaluating and planning services for children. Decisions remain as to how, where and when child indicators data eventually will be published and integrated into state and local planning efforts.

To get a brochure on the Alaska Child Indicators project, visit our web site at www.eed.state.ak.us/EarlyDev/

COLLABORATION

B•R•I•E•F•I•N•G•S

New Vaccine for Ear Infections

The Food and Drug Administration have approved a new vaccine, called Prevnar, which fights middle ear infections. The vaccine protects children against a type of bacteria that leads to pneumococcal disease, the most common cause of ear infections in children. Childhood ear infections are responsible for 27 million doctors' visits each year and cost society an estimated $5 billion in medical care, antibiotics and parent time off work. Chronic cases of ear infections can cause permanent hearing loss or require ear tube surgery. Hearing problems in very young children have been linked to later delays in reading and writing.

Studies show that children who receive the vaccine are 23 percent less likely to have frequent bouts of ear infections and 20 percent less likely to need ear tube surgery. The vaccine is 100 percent effective against pneumococcal meningitis and bacteremia, a severe bloodstream infection.

The vaccine does have some drawbacks. It is more costly than other childhood vaccinations. The four-shot series will cost about $230, about the same as all other childhood vaccinations combined. The vaccine is also effective on only seven of the 80 types of pneumoccocus. However those seven are responsible for about 85 percent of severe diseases and 65 percent of middle ear infections. The Center for Disease Control recommends the vaccine be given to all infants and children up to age 2. The vaccine should also be given to unvaccinated children between the ages of 2 and 5 who have a history of chronic illness and ear infections, or have high risk conditions such as sickle cell disease or AIDS. Check with your health care provider for more information about this new vaccine.

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June 2000

State Head Start and
Collaboration Office
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Head Start friends and family:

Transitions, changes, opportunities, unfinished business, all these things characterize the Head Start Collaboration office and the work each one of you do every day.

The Collaboration project has three fundamental purposes:

- to build early childhood systems and ensure access to comprehensive services and supports for all low income children
- to create partnership agreements and initiatives between Head Start and state or federal programs and to strengthen Head Start's role as an active partner in state initiatives on behalf of children and their families
- to facilitate the involvement of Head Start in state policies, plans, processes and decisions affecting the Head Start target population and other low income families

In the past, we have jumped on the opportunities that impact and change systems. We have acted as the instigator, the collaborator, the facilitator, and the contributor for many statewide children's initiatives. In the future, we must continue to look at the challenges and work left to be done in the following areas:

- The Alaska Partners should have its system for early education development placed into a new Early Development Collaboration Council. This broad-based group will facilitate the implementation and coordination of the education and professional development programs. It will give "expert advice" to advocacy on policy for the state's early childhood programs.
- By 2003, many Head Start staff will be required to have an AA degree. Head Start has undertaken a partnership with the University of Alaska for distance delivery educational services. We hope the "Circles of Learning" project will provide a reasonable route for very busy Head Start staff to complete course work successfully.
- Family Wellness/Mental Health is a priority for staff, families and children in Head Start. We have planned and developed one of the best family wellness models in the nation. But to fully implement this important program, Head Start grantees need additional staff and staff training. The Mental Health Trust provides us with an opportunity for the Family Wellness model to be funded and recognized and to continue our prevention and early intervention efforts.
- The Poverty of Access language we use in rural communities to serve all age-eligible children can and should be expanded. We should be able to serve the pre-natal to five population based on the findings of community needs assessments and then receive funding for a locally designed option to meet those needs.
- The Quality Schools Initiative sets standards for teachers, schools and students. Where does early childhood fit? How do we build the bridges of understanding about what is appropriate for the growth and development and success of young children? How do we involve parents, school board members, health providers in

continued

the discussion about children who are healthy and learning; and schools that have appropriate, comprehensive programs for our youngest students in Kindergarten through third grade? I think we have the responsibility to provide leadership to the Department of Education and Early Development, advisory boards, state board, communities and others...

- The state legislature has "mandated" that all children be independent readers by third grade and that all seniors pass an exit exam. Have we made a strong connection between our children's health and learning? It was interesting to participate with WIC, Public Health, and Head Start in the Anemia task force this year. We know that anemic children, that all children, who are not healthy, do not perform up to capacity, that learning can be a struggle and remediation costly. Head Start requires all children to have health screenings and follow up. Last year only 59% of enrolled Head Start children completed their medical screenings. Public Health nursing, EPDST, Denali Kid Care, and schools must work together to support a system that keeps kids healthy and learning so they can be successful readers in third grade and graduate with a high school diploma. We must continue to advocate for a responsive prevention health system for Alaska's young children.

- Only 23% of the eligible Head Start children are served in Alaska. At least one legislator this year voiced his concern about the cost of Head Start versus child care. We need to systematically educate the public about the comprehensive nature of Head Start and the ways it makes a difference for individual children and their families. At the same time, we need to be advocates for abroad range of services for children no matter where or how they live - homeless, rural, or urban. It will be a challenge for each program in each community to track and report on child development and growth. We hope that we will be able to show how Head Start really makes a difference. (We just keep trying don't we?)

- Prevention and early intervention is still the core of what we do in Head Start. Almost ten years ago I came across a publication that has much to say about our government sponsored programs. "Much of the system is constructed around entry points that are designed to serve families in crisis. Our system tends to treat each family member in isolation... a program for every person, a program for every problem." Making the System Work for Poor Children, John F. Kennedy School of Government – Harvard. 1991. We are building a vehicle to change this statement. This May a joint interdepartmental work group from Health and Social Services and Education and Early Development completed a strategic plan for working together on programs for young children. It is an opportunity for us to get our act together before we move out to engage partners from other departments, agencies and communities. It is also a chance to use indicators of child well being to improve the lives of children pre-natal to eight.

There are so many wonderful opportunities for children and families, for planning and bringing new ideas into action and, of course, facing the challenges of unfinished business.

It is hard to leave this wonderful job, my colleagues, the Alaska Head Start Association members, Directors, Head Start X and XI Regional office partners, my collaboration buddies, the Quality Center staff, the children and families... I saw it written on a wall somewhere – "You know who you are..." Thank you for doing this work for children every day. No one can do this stuff alone.

Marilyn

Alaska's Children Trust

The Alaska Children's Trust has increased the amount and number of grants for community-based programs that help break the ongoing cycle of family violence. This year, the trust is awarding 19 grants totaling a record $310,000. Grants will go toward a variety of innovative programs from a community-parenting program in Sand Point, to the Saxman Breakfast Club for hungry youngsters, to a Covenant House program for young single mothers in Anchorage. In 1996 the Legislature and Governor Tony Knowles agreed to reactivate the dormant Children's Trust Fund with a $6 million deposit. Additional fundraising efforts have increased the ACT fund principal to $9.2 million. Interest generated from this principal is used to fund the community grants.

Governor Knowles announced this year's grantees at a news conference at the Juneau Family Birth Center, one of the new grantees. On hand for the announcement were members of the ACT board including, Chairwoman Carol Brice of Fairbanks and Judy Salo of Wasilla. Following is a complete list of the grant recipients.

Organization: Anchorage Center for Families
Project Name: Child Abuse Prevention Campaign
Community: Anchorage/Statewide
Grant Award: $15,000

The Child Abuse Prevention Campaign is a public awareness media series that can be replicated by any community in the state to increase public awareness about specific behaviors that put children at risk of abuse and/or neglect. Shaken Baby Syndrome will be the focus of this year's campaign.

Calendar of Events

June 12-13 Washington, D.C.	*The Surgeon General's Workshop & Conference on n Children and Oral Health*	elazenby@kervic.com
June 13-15 Seattle, WA	*Region 10 State Child Care Conference Enhancing Early Care and Education*	CCBLSP 202.639.4465
June 28-July 1 Washington, D.C.	*Head Start's 5th National Research Conference "Developmental and Contextual Transitions Of Children and Families*	
July 9-13 Arlington, VA	*National Indian Head Start Directors Association's 10th National Training Conference and 20th Year Celebration.*	405.360.2919
August 2000 Seattle, WA	*Region X Early Head Start Conference*	foltzm@pdx.edu
September 11-14 Seattle, WA	*Year 3 Special Quest: Regions IX, X, XI XII EHS & Migrant Head Start*	
October 12-15 Clinton, TN	*2000 Policy & Advocacy Institute for Emerging Child Care & Early Education Leaders*	CDFchildcare@childrendefense.org
December 2000 Washington, D.C.	*Head Start National Institute on Early Education and Child Development*	atranks@pal-tec.com
January 23-27 Washington, D.C.	*5th Annual Head Start and Child Care Birth to Three Institute — call for proposals*	(202)638-1144

Organization: APRN
Project Name: Statewide Child Abuse Prevention Campaign
Community: Statewide
Grant Award: $24,532

The "Statewide Child Abuse Prevention Campaign" will produce and distribute messages to parents, extended families, and the general public, focusing on the importance of meeting children's basic developmental needs through effective parenting and community support. The campaign, "Partners in Prevention", with assistance from the Alaska Statewide Network on Child Abuse and Neglect, will produce 24 different parenting messages that will reach 100,000 listeners in 330 communities across Alaska.

Organization: Covenant House Alaska
Project Name: "Project Nurture"
Community: Anchorage
Grant Award: $14,000

Passage House is a residential facility for single pregnant and parenting mothers ages 16 to 20. The Alaska Children's Trust continues to fund "Project Nurture". This program provides home visiting and supportive services over a 12-month period. Following discharge graduates of the program become mentors for current residents. Achievements include: 100% of the graduates participated in life-skills and basic-parenting training, advanced academically by either re-enrolling in school or starting a GED course; there were no unplanned second pregnancies amongst the graduates, and no documented child abuse or neglect reports.

Organization: Eastern Aleutian Tribes Inc.
Project Name: Community Parenting Project
Community: Sand Point
Grant Award: $10,277

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Alaska's Children Trust, *continued*

This project provides support networks to parents of the Aleutians East Borough, targeting parents of children under the age of three. Services include the addition of parenting classes, support groups, and home visits. The anticipated achievements are to decrease the number of non-emergency, after-hour calls to clinics, decrease child accident emergencies, promote healthy infants and children, and increase community based parenting support and resources.

Organization: Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption
Project Name: Responsible Fathers
Community: Fairbanks
Grant Award: $9,997

Responsible Fathers is a project designed to help teen fathers increase involvement and responsibility for their children. Outreach activities target all teen parents, but focus on teen fathers. The interactive phase will include supervised playtime, teen parent mediation services, work exchange and parent education. Outreach will include teen fathers in the Fairbanks Youth Facility, visits to senior high classes and presentations of 'Fathers are Important' to the public.

Organization: Fairbanks Resource Agency
Project Name: Supported Parenting
Community: Fairbanks
Grant Award: $11,337

Supported Parenting is a hands-on parent education program designed for parents with developmental and learning disabilities, and for families experiencing crisis/dysfunction. The ACT grant added home-based services for support and parenting intervention to keep children safe and healthy. This program provides a unique service to the area by assuring parents maintain safe and healthy homes for optimum parenting.

Organization: Frontier Community Services
Project Name: Early Intervention "Child's Play"
Community: Central Kenai Peninsula
Grant Award: $21,000

Frontier Community Services will continue to provide support services to families throughout the Kenai/Soldotna area. The target population for "Child's Play" includes: family, parent(s), and foster parent(s), of children birth to five who experience problems associated with ADD/ADHD, FAS/FAE or early exposure to drugs. This program will provide year round service for the prevention of child abuse and neglect by providing home visits, child and family playgroups, parent mentoring and community awareness.

Organization: Gateway Center for Human Services
Project Name: Saxman Youth Breakfast Club
Community: Ketchikan/Saxman
Grant Award: $14,902

This Saxman Youth Breakfast Club is a unique program that will continue to offer Saxman youth a nutritious morning snack prior to boarding the school bus. Youth are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities and discussions, in addition to receiving assistance with their school projects. The club is staffed by parent volunteers and a Saxman youth liaison with frequent visitation from a local social services representative. Saxman community members developed the concept for the breakfast club as a means of connecting families to helping resources.

Organization: Homer Children's Services
Project Name: Infant Learning/Parents as Teachers
Community: Homer
Grant Award: $11,619.50

The Parents as Teachers program is a family education and support program designed to promote positive experiences for parents and children in the early years. The ACT funded portion extends home-based services to all families in the community. Services are provided primarily in the home, but with a center based playgroup. The anticipated outcomes include a higher level of parenting and nurturing skills among all family members, a better understanding of their children's development, and better use of community resources.

Organization: Juneau Family Birth Center
Project Name: Young Families Program
Community: Juneau
Grant Award: $28,037

The Young Families Program will support teen parents throughout their pregnancy and following the birth of their child. A combination of pregnancy and parenting education, labor and birth support, after-care support and mentoring will help to ensure that teen parents receive the support needed to promote a healthy relationship/bond with their baby. The program empowers teens throughout the birth process, and helps build confidence for their care-taking role. This early interaction will set the stage for a lifetime of healthy child-parent interactions.

Organization: Kuspuk School District
Project Name: Life Skills Education Project
Community: Aniak
Grant Award: $4,500

This project will offer high school youth the opportunity to receive life skills instruction with an emphasis on peer helping and violence prevention. The curriculum stresses prevention and avoidance of crisis situations. The anticipated goal is for program participants to be able to identify community support services and demonstrate competency in life skills. The peer relationships formed through the program will be continued on a volunteer basis.

Organization: Matanuska-Susitna School District
Project Name: The Eagle' Nest Family Resource Center
Community: Sutton
Grant Award: $22,500

The Eagle's Nest is a family-resource center located at the Sutton Elementary School. Parental involvement and early intervention is the focus and foundation of the Eagle's Nest activities. This prevention program offers community playgroups, the "Parents As Teachers" birth to 3 curriculum/classes, and father in-

volvement through the D.A.D. club (Developmentally Appropriate Dads). The Eagles Nest was designed by and for members of the Sutton community. The anticipated outcome is family empowerment through increased communication, participation, and educational opportunities.

Organization: Nome Community Center
Project Name: Youth Empowered Serve - YES
Community: Nome/Koyuk
Region: Western
Grant Award: $28,429

This continuing program will organize and support the YES Youth Council for prevention. YES approaches the problem of child abuse and neglect by empowering and marshaling the power of young people themselves to identify the needs and strategies to solve problems. Primary prevention activities provide support and counseling for the young people involved in this program. YES participants will continue to collaborate and coordinate with current youth initiated projects, community agencies and organizations involved with prevention.

Organization: Norton Sound Health Corporation
Project Name: Pathfinders Parenting Project
Community: 15 Villages in the Norton Sound Region
Grant Award: $29,544

This program was developed to provide support to the families within the Norton Sound Region. The Village Based Counselors and the Pathfinder Youth Counselors act as support staff within their local communities in leading parenting classes, providing resource materials and making referrals to families in need. The parenting curriculum is based around traditional "Community Parenting Practices" and is offered in a manner that promotes group participation in the healing and learning cycle. Parenting classes will take place in each community and will be offered throughout the year. The anticipated outcome is to develop support networks within the community, replacing the need for outside services and promoting self-sufficiency and overall health of the village.

Organization: The Resource Center for Parents and Children
Project Name: Parent Outreach Project
Community: Fairbanks
Grant Award: $12,850

The Parent Outreach Project will continue to provide information and training for Parent Outreach workers in neighborhoods and villages in the northern region. The goal of this project is to positively influence families, raise community awareness, and change attitudes about child abuse and neglect and its prevention. Participants will be linked to this project through direct contact with various tribal governments and agencies working with families. The project will continue to recruit, train and support new parent outreach specialists and implement parent outreach programs in unserved communities. Parent education workshops will be held in the workplace, schools, churches and other public places.

Organization: Safe & Fear-Free Environment, Inc. (S.A.F.E.)
Project Name: SAFE for LIFE
Community: Dillingham
Grant Award: $29,952

The SAFE for Life program is an integrated and comprehensive approach to providing children and their families the tools and information necessary to prevent domestic violence, child abuse and other problems related to family violence. This grant will support a new child advocate position and a Children Service's Coordinator position to work with youth currently living in the S.A.F.E. shelter. SAFE's Children's Services will also be responsible for planning and delivering a comprehensive community education, outreach and awareness program in Dillingham and surrounding villages.

Organization: St. George Traditional Council
Project Name: Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Program
Community: St. George Island
Grant Award: $4,000

This project will continue to address child abuse and neglect by developing a long-range program based on the Aleut cultural, spiritual, and social norms and values of the community. A panel composed of representatives from several community groups will complete a community assessment. Technical assistance will be provided to the community in order to develop a comprehensive long-term child abuse/neglect prevention program for St. George.

Organization: Volunteers of America, Alaska
Project Name: The Strengthening of Grandfamilies Project
Community: Anchorage
Grant Award: $6,642

The Strengthening of Grandfamilies Project will continue to provide services to families headed by grandparents. These services include respite care through a summer prevention camp for 30 children of alcoholics and/or addicts, who are being raised by their grandparent(s); a winter family camp for grandparented families (40 people); No Empty Nest (NEN) telephone and newsletter support for grandparents, and 10 one hour training/education presentations at NEN meetings. Volunteers of America proposes a strengthening of these grandparented families through a multi-faceted approach in which respite is provided and the children and the grandparents are educated, encouraged, and empowered, both individually as well as in a family unit.

Organization: Wrangell Community Services
Project Name: Parent Education and Support Services
Community: Wrangell
Grant Award: $10,040

Wrangell Community Services will continue to increase support services for parents of all age children and adolescents through parent education classes. An on-going parent support group will give parents a forum for sharing experiences, asking questions and improving their parenting skills.

Note:

- 2nd year funding
- 3rd year funding
- 4th year funding

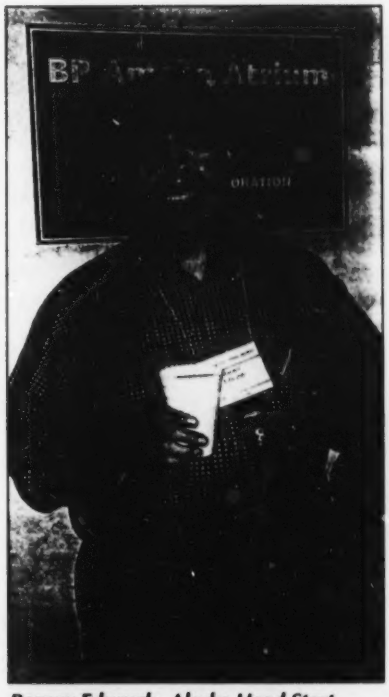
Alaska Head Start Association

NEWS

Region X Head Start Training Conference

"Celebrating Our Past: Creating Our Future,

March 1-3, 2000



Barney Edwards, Alaska Head Start Association.

Kathi Pepe, Program Manager; Sandi Haynes, Director, Kids Corp.

Marguerite Andreu, Region XI, AIPB; Helen Sheirbeck, Chief, Region XI, AIPB; Patti Howell, Director, Region XI, QIC

Teresa Pingayak, Chevak; Marilyn Webb, Juneau; Shirley Jackson, Kake.

Commissioner Patricia Montoya, ACFY

Ron Herndon, Director NHSA; Nick Jones, Portland Trailblazers; Father Michael Oleksa, Keynote Speaker

Nikki Kinne; Michelle Hooper, Director, ALPA Golden Head Start.

National Head Start News

This May, Senators endorsed the Clinton administration's proposal for a $1 billion gain in funding for Head Start bringing the budget to $6.2 billion for the fiscal year that begins October 1. The House of Representatives, however, has yet to endorse the increase. During congressional negotiations, senators have asked for more progress to even out nationwide access to the program. A Senate report notes that only 23% of eligible Alaska preschoolers participate in Head Start compared with 42 percent of low-income preschools that have access to the program nationwide. Alaska senior Senator Ted Stevens is a strong advocate for Head Start programs nationwide and in Alaska. As chairman of the Appropriation Committee which sets spending levels for Head Start, Senator Stevens has helped the committee focus on the importance of Head Start programs for children and families.

Welfare to Work, *continued*

families. States must limit the amount of time a family can continue to receive cash benefits up to a maximum of five years. A limited number of exemptions to this time-limit rule do exist, but many families will not qualify for these exemptions. Alaska has chosen to impose a five-year lifetime limit, so once a family has received public assistance benefits for this 60-month period, unless they meet certain exemptions, they will no longer be eligible for cash benefits. **The critical question we will soon be facing is what happens to dependent children when their parents are no longer eligible for help and they are unable to work.** Is it acceptable that parents will have no money to purchase food, clothing, or cough medicine for their children, let alone pay for rent and utilities?

Evaluating the Future

The coming years will see a series of national and state specific studies evaluating the results and effects of welfare reform efforts. Preliminary results from Alaska's "Leaver" survey will be available this fall. Most of these studies will provide important information about our welfare system. Some studies will provide important information about the health and well-being of children. These findings will be used by policymakers to evaluate current policy and to choose the direction of future welfare reform efforts. The question remains whether we will choose numbers or children.

Information sources: *Evaluating Welfare Reform, A Guide for Scholars & Practitioners*, School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland; Welfare *Reform Status Report, October 1999*, Alaska Division of Public Assistance; *Welfare to What? Early Findings on Family Hardship and Well-Being*, Children's Defense Fund, National Coalition for the Homeless; *Remember the Children, Mothers Balance Work and Child Care under Welfare Reform*, University of California, Berkeley and Yale University; *Children and Welfare Reform*, Issue Brief 7, National Center for Children in Poverty; *A Piece of the Puzzle, How States Can use Education to Make Work Pay for Welfare Recipients*, Educational Testing Service Leadership 2000 Series Conversations; *Welfare's Changing Face*, Dan Foomkin, Washington Post 7/23/98

STATUS REPORT

Alaska's Children

American's Kindergartners

First year data from a five year Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of 22, 000 children, their families, schools and classrooms shows that:

- 82 percent of children enter kindergarten with print familiarity skills
- 66 percent recognize letters
- 94 percent begin school knowing their numbers to ten and basic shapes

Most children enter school with good social skills such as:

- Accepting peer ideas - 74 percent
- Forming friendships – 77 percent

Some children enter school with potentially disruptive behaviors such as:

- Arguing – 11 percent
- Fighting – 10 percent

Differences in children's reading, math, social skills and health that are related to poverty, parental education and other risk factors are already evident when children enter kindergarten.

This five-year study will continue to follow the same sample of children through the fifth grade, regularly gathering data on their reading, math, social skills, physical development and school experiences.

source: U.S.Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Alcohol Index for Alaska

- Alcohol is implicated in 83% of child abuse investigations
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the only 100% preventable birth defect
- Since 1991, the number of women reporting alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been cut in half, however; Alaska has the highest incidence of FAS in the nation: 4 times the national average
- The life-time cost of care for one FAS infant is about $1.4 million

source: "Finding the Answers to Tough Questions about Substance Abuse in Alaska" 1999 Annual Report, State of Alaska, Advisory Board of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

Welfare to Work

- Since 1997, 4,000 families have left welfare
- Welfare savings for Fiscal Year 1999 topped $41 million
- Over the past two years, the average number of children served by child care subsidy programs has grown by 2,500.
- State spending for child care subsidies has grown by more than $12 million to nearly $32 million
- Since January 1998 the number of unlicensed child care providers has grown from 450 to 1,400

source: Welfare Reform Status Report, October 1999

Alaska's Children

Alaska Head Start State Collaboration Project
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
P.O. Box 112100
Juneau, Alaska 99811-2100

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Juneau AK

Collaboration Briefings, *continued*

School Funding

At the beginning of the 2000 legislative session, Governor Knowles proposed a $510 million bond package for port/harbor construction and school repair and construction. The bond proposal for school projects followed a priority list developed by the Department of Education and Early Development. The list specifically addressed critical projects in rural Alaska and the legal decision issued by a Superior Court Judge that found the state guilty of discrimination against Alaska Natives for its lack of upkeep of rural schools. The bond package finally passed by the House and Senate was paired down to $303 million and included $198 million for school repair and construction, port projects and a new library at the University of Alaska. Legislative allocation of funds for school projects did not follow Education's priority list. Examples of projects that were not funded include: replacement of rotted support beams at the Nulato school which has been closed for safety reasons; Shishmaref school roof repairs to stop water from leaking into interior walls, replacements for existing windows that are warped and cannot be opened, purchase of fire alarms and sewage lagoon upgrades to stop lagoon overflow and seepage; Takotna High school water project so the school could have running water and flush toilets. Examples of projects funded by the legislature are $400,000 carpet installation for Mat-Su schools, a $10 million allocation for Fairbanks schools that was not requested by the school district.

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